DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 385 127 FL 023 111

AUTHOR Brecht, Richard D.; Walton, A. Ronald

TITLE The United States Service Industry in the Global Economy: Maintaining the Comparative Advantage.

INSTITUTION National Foreign Language Center, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Feb 95
NOTE 5p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Competition; *Educational Needs; Educational Policy; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Information Technology; *Intercultural Communication; International Cooperation; *International Trade; *Language Role; Public Policy; Second Language Instruction; *Second Languages; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS *General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade; *North American Free Trade Agreement

ABSTRACT

Recent developments making more urgent the need for second language skills among the United States' population are examined. Specifically, a meeting of representatives of service professions and U.S. trade representatives concerning the ramifications of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) for U.S. citizens is discussed. A major shift from provision of goods to provision of services is forecast, with substantial implications for language skills requirements on the part of U.S. citizens. It is suggested that currently, the effect of the trade agreements is to encourage importation of skills from abroad rather than exportation of skills overseas, because of imbalance in language skills; professionals from other countries commonly have English language skills, while American professionals do not have adequate foreign language skills. Advancement in information technology is seen to render this situation even more urgent. Language training at the school and higher education levels and public policy that is more supportive of international educational exchange are seen as essential in addressing this situation. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

The United States Service Industry in the Global Economy: Maintaining the Comparative Advantage

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
David Maxwell
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

by Richard D. Brecht & A. Ronald Walton

ED 385 127

Proponents of foreign language in the United States are used to fighting an uphill battle with students, parents, educators, politicians, and policy makers at all levels and in all domains of this society. It's not that the ability to speak a language other than English (a non-English language (NEL)) is not admirable or even useful; it's just that, in the scale of things which children or even adults need, a NEL just does not match up with, say, history and geography, not to mention math, science, and English. In the face of this societal mindset, language policy in this country has remained on the fringe of debate concerning our national well-being.

Conditions now exist, however, which indicate that this society's mind just may be changing, that a sea change in America's attitude to NELs is now taking place on a scale similar to the one in Australia in the 1970s. The Australia of the 1960s was as "devoutly monolingual" as the United States is today. Yet a collusion of factors, including immigration, the breakup of the Commonwealth, and economic considerations brought Australians to the realization that their future as a nation depended more on their being part of Asia than being a former member of the British Empire. After this major shift in national self identity, the language questions changed from whether NELs (or LOTEs, as they call them) were at all important to issues like what NELs should the nation focus on and how could these linguistic competencies be best instilled in young and old alike. We would contend that a sea change of similar impact is now well underway in the United States.

On February 17, 1995 representatives of dozens of service professions met in Washington, D.C.[1] with representatives of the U.S. Trade Representative's office to discuss the ramifications of the NAFTA and the GATT for professionals and other citizens of the United

FL023111

[1]The meeting was organized by the Center for Quality Assurance in International Education.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

States. The issues raised at this meeting represent one of the principal factors in the major shift in attitudes about NELs in the U.S. and portend profound consequences for the future of the U.S. economy and for the United States education system.

Services, as opposed to goods, constitute three fifths of the Gross Domestic Product of the United States, thus the characterization of the U.S. as a "service economy." Accordingly, as a percent of exports, services represent a significant and growing percentage of overall trade, being the only aspect of the balance of trade which is positive. Because no other country in the world can rival the U.S. in the size and scope of services which it is capable of delivering, this comparative advantage has become a primary focus of government efforts in world trade negotiations for the NAFTA and the GATT (and FTAA and APEC, for that matter). Specifically, these treaties are aimed at providing market access to U.S. professionals by removing all discriminatory treatment aimed at restricting their ability to provide their services to the eighty one signatories of the GATT, the *quid pro quo* being the guarantee of access here to foreign professionals.[2]

This major shift from goods to services, both domestically as well as internationally, has immense consequences for the competencies of U.S. professionals as well as all U.S. citizens. While the sale and transference of goods requires human interaction and communication before the fact, the sale and provision of services obligatorily entails such interaction while the product, if you will, is being used. Thus, selling oil drilling rigging may require complex negotiations and technical specifications in order to accomplish the deal. By contrast, the provision of health care or legal services, for example, means that U.S. professionals must constantly interact with citizens of other cultures for as long as the service is being provided. Nor is the communications restricted to elite negotiators or highly placed private and public officials who might be expected to command English. The provision of services to ordinary citizens on a daily basis, all assertions of the ubiquity of English notwithstanding, requires that the professionals be

---

[2]The principles governing the establishing of non-discriminatory rules are: transparency (all conditions must be made know to all), national treatment (treat foreigners as one treats one's own citizens), and most favored national treatment (citizens from one country treated equally as citizens from another).

competent to interact and communicate successfully with people in their own languages and on the basis of their own cultural understandings and assumptions.

The problem with the current situation is that the trade agreements are "backfiring." While they are indeed providing access to U.S. professionals, to this point professions in the United States are being forced to focus more on demands for access to American society on the part of foreigners than on developing access for their members abroad. (Approximately one half of the physical therapists certified in the United States every year are from abroad.) The reason for this imbalance is that professionals from other nations have the English language skills which enable them to work here in the United States. On the other hand, the number of architects or nurses, for example, with the language skills to interact on a daily basis with ordinary citizens in China, Japan, Brazil, or Russia, for example, is so small that the expansion of these professional services abroad is greatly inhibited. In fact, now that trade agreements like GATT and NAFTA are in place, discriminatory trade practices are being eliminated, with the result that the principal obstacle to the export of American service around the world is simply the ability of the professional practitioners to communicate with ordinary people in different cultures.

This huge rise in the need to communicate with citizens from other cultures is simply the mirror image of the change that has taken place in the United States because of the influx of immigrants from around the world. Here too, domestic marketing and services, while they can be carried out in English or NELs, are best provided on the basis of full comprehension and mutual understanding between native bearers of different cultures and communications systems.

The third element in this sea change of personal communication is the massive technological advances made by the telecommunications industry, which is promising to make instantaneous and reasonably priced person-to-person interaction possible for any two people regardless of their physical location on this globe. In other words, the ability to communicate with anyone, anywhere, anytime has been furnished with the means to do so.

The collusion of factors described above (globalization of employment and services, the domestic communications needs, and the telecommunications revolution) represent the conditions for a "sea change" in the attitude towards non-English languages (NELs) in the United States and, consequently, in the focus of language study in our schools, colleges, and

universities. Indeed, in language programs at the school level we shall continue to indulge young people with social interactions and curiosity about different cultures. Similarly, at the college and university level we shall continue to educate language and areas studies specialists as well as provide high level expertise in academic disciplines like literature, economics, political science and the like. Nevertheless, to meet all the real needs of Americans in the future the major focus in language training must be towards providing the interactive personal skills which are demanded in the day-to-day situations of employment and human services provision of normal human beings who just happen to be born in different cultural settings. And the shift of focus from "scholastic" to work-a-day will also entail a raising of the emphasis from accuracy to interactive negotiating of meaning between two well-intentioned individuals struggling to successfully get across their information and points of view on matters of genuine concern to one or both.

Finally, to bring about true understanding of and competence in cross-cultural communication in our young people, American education and policy makers will also have to change their basic attitude towards exchanges and study abroad programs as a luxury reserved for those in our system who have extra time and money to burn. Ask anyone who has lived in another culture: there is no more effective means to acquire the real competencies in interacting with people in other cultures. This skill is vital for American professionals if they are to be successful in their professional practice in the global service marketplace. To do so, the public and private sectors must find ways to make the opportunity to live and study abroad accessible to all future professionals with ambitions of selling their services around the world.

February 1995
National Foreign Language Center
University of Maryland, College Park